



Gadamer and the Problem of How to Relate Kant and Hegel to Hermeneutics

Rudolf A. Makkreel

Volume 53, numéro 1, février 1997

L'herméneutique de H.-G. Gadamer

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/401046ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/401046ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Makkreel, R. A. (1997). Gadamer and the Problem of How to Relate Kant and Hegel to Hermeneutics. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 53(1), 151–166.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/401046ar>

GADAMER AND THE PROBLEM OF HOW TO RELATE KANT AND HEGEL TO HERMENEUTICS

Rudolf A. MAKKEEL

RÉSUMÉ : *Un des buts du présent texte est de réexaminer la signification herméneutique relative que Gadamer a assignée à Kant et à Hegel. Étant donné que Hegel procède de manière historique et insiste pour que tout soit constamment redéfini, il faut reconnaître que sa dialectique et l'herméneutique présentent certains parallèles. Il n'empêche qu'au bout du compte Hegel s'intéresse davantage à l'explication logique d'un système total qu'à la compréhension du processus historique. De plus, ses propres remarques sur l'interprétation ne manifestent pas d'appréciation de son importance. Par opposition à la philosophie « para-herméneutique » de Hegel, la philosophie de Kant pourrait être appelée « proto-herméneutique ». Kant réfléchit sur le sens de l'existence humaine et les limites de notre connaissance de manière plus pertinente à notre situation herméneutique contemporaine que les prétentions absolutistes de Hegel touchant la compréhension universelle. Afin de manifester cette pertinence, on considère ici les vues de Kant concernant l'interprétation, en relation avec sa théorie d'ensemble du jugement, qui contient aussi de surprenantes discussions du rôle des préjugés dans notre vie.*

SUMMARY : *One of the aims of this paper is to revise the relative hermeneutical significance that Gadamer assigned to Kant and Hegel. Because Hegel proceeds historically and insists that everything be constantly redefined, his dialectic admittedly manifests certain parallels to hermeneutics. Nevertheless, in the end Hegel is more concerned with the logical explication of a total system than with the understanding of historical process. Moreover, his own comments on interpretation do not manifest an appreciation of its importance. By contrast to Hegel's "para-hermeneutical" philosophy, Kant's philosophy could be called "proto-hermeneutical." Kant reflects on the meaning of human existence and the limits of our knowledge in ways that are more relevant to our contemporary hermeneutical situation than Hegel's absolutist claims about universal comprehension. To show this relevance Kant's views on interpretation are considered in relation to his overall theory of judgment, which also includes some surprising discussions about the role of prejudices in our life.*

In *Truth and Method* it is clear that Kant and Hegel represent important influences on Gadamer — the former provokes him, the latter inspires him. Detailed discus-

sions of the *Critique of Judgment* are used to show how Kant nudged aesthetics and hermeneutics in the wrong direction, that is, towards Dilthey's methodological approach. Kant's reflections on the topics of taste, aesthetic play, and the *sensus communis* serve as irritants that lead Gadamer to recast them in a less subjective fashion. Hegel, by contrast, stands as a model for Gadamer's hermeneutics in that he conceives of historical objectifications not so much as expressive of individuals as manifestations of a communal spirit. One of the central claims of *Truth and Method* is that the task of hermeneutics should be defined not in terms of the Schleiermacher-Dilthey ideal of reconstructing the author's meaning, but in terms of Hegel's ideal of dialectical mediation.

In this essay I will consider these attitudes towards Kant and Hegel in more detail, at the same time acknowledging that Gadamer has subsequently softened his attack on Kant and Dilthey. But in assessing the general validity of Gadamer's response to Kant and Hegel, I will also attempt to show that Kant's reflections on interpretation are more useful than what Hegel has to say about interpretation. Of course, one can make important contributions to hermeneutics apart from one's account of the task of interpretation. Thus Hegel's historical approach to philosophy has much of substance to offer contemporary hermeneutics. It is also true that Kant's first two *Critiques* display a constructive approach that is often uncongenial to hermeneutics. Nevertheless, in the third *Critique* and in his later writings on religion and history, Kant reflects on the meaning of human existence and the limits of our knowledge in ways that to me are more relevant to our contemporary hermeneutical situation than Hegel's absolutist claims about universal comprehension. To show this relevance I will consider Kant's views on interpretation in relation to his overall theory of judgment, which also includes some interesting discussions about the role of prejudices in our life.

I. CREATING A PROPER AESTHETIC MODEL FOR HERMENEUTICS

Gadamer recognizes that the way in which philosophers approach aesthetics is definitive for their interpretation of humanity. He follows Hegel in attacking Kant for having conceived aesthetics too much in terms of feeling. Kant's supposed failure to do justice to the cognitive dimensions of aesthetic experience is seen as responsible for reducing its significance to a mere pleasurable state of mind in the life of the individual — a so-called *Erlebnis* that is private. By contrast, Gadamer revives the Hegelian notion of *Erfahrung* as extracting the truth from its subject-matter. Gadamer criticizes the aesthetic *Erlebnis* as a mode of "differentiation"¹ by which a subject becomes removed from the world. It is ironic that aesthetic *Erlebnis*, which was modeled on a mode of imaginative play that allows us to feel our wholeness and involvement with humanity, is now criticized for inducing a mode differentiation with the opposite effect. The aesthetic playfulness that was embraced by Schiller as an antidote to specialization is now charged with being itself a mode of specialization.

1. See Hans-Georg GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, New York, Crossroads, 1989, p. 116f.

The model for Gadamer's aesthetic *Erfahrung* is the idea of a play as a public performance that encompasses its various participants. Gadamer is very effective in arguing that the meaning of an artistic performance is not to be judged by some "authentic original" that is to be reproduced in the manner of Schleiermacher. He uses the idea of historical mediation to allow the past to have a presence in the present. By conceiving of the transmission of a work from author to performers to audiences, Gadamer is able to focus on the ways in which the meaning of a work of art is public and grows over time. The *Erfahrung* of the truth of the work is claimed to be "contemporaneous (*gleichzeitig*)"² insofar as it allows a work to be effective and relevant over time. A work that has renewed itself in this way is a "classic." By contrast, the ideal of reproducing the original meaning of a work leads to an antiquarian ideal of a "classical" work as belonging to a past epoch. The aesthetic *Erlebnis* is supposedly restorative in this way and strives for a "simultaneity (*Simultaneität*)" that imaginatively reproduces the original.³

Placing aesthetic play in this public framework is an important contribution. Conceiving play as not merely a private imaginative process but as also the public process whereby meaning gets passed on through the dialogical interchange made possible by language itself, enriches our understanding of the meaning of a drama. However, there is nothing about the concept of aesthetic *Erlebnis* as conceived by Dilthey that warrants Gadamer's narrow account of it. Dilthey's lived experience is not at all divorced from reality.⁴ Although it is located in an individual subject, that subject is always situated in a public world. *Erlebnis* can be applied equally to a reader of a novel and to a member of an audience at a public performance. Even the reader in the privacy of her living room has an "acquired psychic nexus"⁵ that leads every present state of mind to be influenced not only by her own past but also by all the worldly events that are involved in that past. There is no unmediated aesthetic *Erlebnis* for Dilthey, nor does he aim at any kind of coincidence with the work: whether in terms of simultaneity or in terms of contemporaneity. The aim of understanding is to make a judgment that articulates what is distinctive about a work from our present point of view. This is a relational process that always involves a certain amount of restructuring — it is not however a process of simple mediation where horizons become fused. There is a sense in which I can participate in a process whereby meaning develops through the tradition, but there is also a sense in which limits must be placed on this to prevent totally anachronistic readings. The trouble with the Hegelian model of mediation is that everything becomes grist for the universal perspective. What makes a

2. GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed., Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1965, p. 121.

3. *Ibid.*

4. See Wilhelm DILTHEY, "Fragments for a Poetics," in *Poetry and Experience, Selected Works*, vol. 5, intr. and ed. by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 223-227.

5. See DILTHEY, "The Imagination of the Poet," in *Poetry and Experience*, p. 97-99.

work of art significant, however, is that there is always a factual core that is stylistically distinctive.⁶

Hegel and Gadamer are correct to claim that a work of art is more than an expression of the particular experiences and attitudes of its author, for it also discloses communal truths that have a more general relevance. But they stand in danger of overlooking how particular *Erlebnisse* are expressed in art, and even more importantly, how the process of expression can at the same time embody more general insights in ways that articulate a distinctive perspective. A work can thus both express something specific about the author's life and articulate some more general truth. These two aspects cannot be separated out as is suggested when the ideal of mediation is described as a process of liberating ourselves from contingency.⁷ Not every particular fact about a work can be subordinated to its universal potential and then dismissed as contingent.

Because of the indefinable convergence of particularity and universality in art, Kant and Dilthey refuse to consider aesthetic judgments as conceptual or epistemic. As a consequence of this they may have placed too much stress on the feeling component of the aesthetic judgment. But what is distinctive about aesthetic feeling for them is its disinterestedness. Kant indicates that disinterested aesthetic feelings are rooted in a *sensus communis* oriented to the human community. As an aesthetic judge I expand my mode of thought and put myself in the place of the other. There are certain feelings that are not just private, but intersubjective. They are correlated with reflective judgments that produce no knowledge (*Wissen*) about what is judged to be beautiful. They make no epistemic contribution in the sense of adding to our experience of the world. Yet they are cognitive in that they have an import for the systematization of our experience. Kant's theory of symbolism allows him to go so far as to claim that through the expression of aesthetic ideas we can sometimes attain "symbolic cognition (*Erkenntnis*)"⁸ of things that exceed our experience of this world. Thus it is possible to cognize God's relation to human beings by means of the analogy of a father to his children. What in the *Critique of Practical Reason* remained a purely abstract rational idea of God can through the aesthetic symbolization of the *Critique of Judgment* receive a quasi-intuitive fulfillment.

In a more recent essay, "Auslegung und Anschaulichkeit" (1980), Gadamer moves somewhat closer to recognizing Kant's importance when he finds in the *Critique of Judgment* the basis for the *Anschaulichkeit* or vividness of metaphor that he wants to defend: "For the theory of metaphor, Kant's remark in Section 59 seems to me most profound: that metaphor at bottom makes no comparison of content, but

6. See the chapter "Style and the Conceptual Articulation of Historical Life," in MAKKREEL, *Dilthey, Philosopher of the Human Studies*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, especially p. 399. This chapter also defends Dilthey's hermeneutics against Gadamer's account of it. See p. 413-421.

7. See GADAMER, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 44.

8. Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by J.H. Bernard, New York, Hafner Press, 1974, § 59, p. 198. See also *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (hereafter Ak), 29 vols., Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1902-1983, 5, 353. For more on the distinction between *Wissen* and *Erkenntnis* see § 91, p. 322; Ak, 5, 470.

rather undertakes the 'transference of reflection upon an object of intuition to a quite different concept to which perhaps an intuition can never directly correspond' (*CJ*, § 59, 198). Does not the poet do that with every word?"⁹ In the essay "The Relevance of Beauty" (1977) Gadamer similarly softens his attacks on Dilthey by allowing works of art "to enhance our feeling for life."¹⁰ Moreover, he seems to moderate his truth claim for art when he writes, "we learn that however unexpected our encounter with beauty may be, it gives us an assurance that the truth does not lie far off and inaccessible to us, but can be encountered in the disorder of reality with all its imperfections, evils, errors, extremes, and fateful confusions."¹¹ This view of beauty as providing the promise of truth is not incompatible with Kant's aesthetics as we have explicated it.

II. HEGEL'S RESERVATIONS ABOUT INTERPRETATION

If there is a rapprochement to be found between Kant and Gadamer, it is at best partial. Kant only reflected on language and symbolism as an afterthought, whereas Hegel's views on language are much more deeply rooted. As Theodore Kisiel puts it in a suggestive essay on Hegel and hermeneutics, "it is language which is introduced from the start [of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*] to sustain the mediation of the immediate through the entire breadth of experience from sense-certainty to the self-transparency of thought thinking itself."¹² Hegel is perceptive in recognizing the importance of language in shaping our experience and as the medium of communication. As someone deeply interested in the role of community in education, all means of human mediation — language, work and action — are taken seriously. Whereas Kant grounded sociability transcendently in a felt *sensus communis*, Hegel grounds it genetically in a public state.

Hegel distrusts feeling as a source of sociability because it does not allow us to get beyond ourselves: "A feeling is always at the same time the enjoyment of self. Even when we are dealing with a matter outside us, feeling brings it back to us and leads us to focus on how we are filled with it (*unsere Erfüllung von der Sache*). [...] He who lives in a subject matter, whether scientific or practical, forgets himself in it, can have no feeling insofar as feeling is a reminder of himself [...]"¹³ Feeling is dismissed as a primitive mode of consciousness and, as part of a critique of Schleiermacher's feeling-based theory of religion, Hegel condemns it as totally inadequate for knowing God.

To commune with God we need to turn to something more objective, namely, intuition as shaped by the arts. Hegel claims that "art was produced because of the

9. GADAMER, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 169f.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

12. Theodore KISIEL, "Hegel and Hermeneutics," in Frederick Weiss, ed., *Beyond Epistemology*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p. 201.

13. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, Werke*, Frankfurt am Rhein, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978, vol. 16, p. 134.

absolute spiritual need that the divine, the spiritual idea be available as an *object* [...] for immediate intuition.”¹⁴ Beautifully formed intuition presents itself both as immediate and as mediated by a divine idea of order. Beauty is thus the promise, not just of truth, but of divinely inspired truth.

However, there is a limit to how much divine truth can be manifested in an intuitive image (*Bild*). The next stage of communing with God comes through representation (*Vorstellung*), which encompasses not only what can be directly imaged, but also what can be indirectly imagined. Hegel defines a representation as an image that has been raised to the form of universality or thought. But as internal and immediate, a representation possesses a mere abstract universality and needs language to express it: “representations are communicable through the word.”¹⁵ Languages are natural means of communicating representations and as such are imperfect according to Hegel. No word is able to adequately merge what is sensuous (the letter) and what is universal (the meaning). The words used to embody religious representations are thus “not to be taken literally (*in eigentlichem Verstande zu nehmen*). For example, [...] creation is merely an image derived from a natural relation of which we know that it is not meant in its immediacy; we know that its meaning involves a relation that is only approximate, and that this sensuous relation at most has something corresponding to the relation that is really meant by God.”¹⁶

It is this level of linguistic usage that has led to traditional hermeneutics, namely, the interpretation of religious texts. The problem as defined by Hegel is to separate what in the Bible is historical fact and what points to a more universal meaning. Throughout his work Hegel is notable for acknowledging the natural and historical origins of our thought. He does not begin with an abstract and isolated transcendental ego, but with concretely situated historical beings. This is what makes Hegel attractive to hermeneutical thinkers such as Gadamer and Ricœur.

However, if we consider Hegel’s more detailed views about interpretation we find a considerable amount of ambivalence about its philosophical status. It turns out that language is a merely natural mode of communication that must be sublated to do justice to the pure spiritual mediation required by philosophy. We will see that Hegel discusses two modes of interpretation, one applying to natural languages that express our subjective representations, the other to objective philosophical concepts. Religion may be content to approach God through the language of subjective representations, but philosophy’s task is to directly present God through objective concepts. This move from representation (*Vorstellung*) to presentation (*Darstellung*) is the move that Hegel proposes to make from Kant’s understanding (*Verstand*) to reason (*Vernunft*) proper. As long as we understand the world representationally we have abstract, piecemeal and inferential knowledge — what we might call justified belief. Only through a reason that comprehends (*begreift*) everything from the perspective of the whole can we have true knowledge, including of God.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 141f.

Hegel uses two different terms to distinguish interpretation at these two levels : 1) *Interpretation* for modes of representational understanding including religious belief ; and 2) *Auslegung* for presentational or conceptual comprehension.

1) *Interpretation* is the process whereby finite persons interpret things that are given to them positively, that is, on authority and/or by faith. Such givens can be revealed religious texts, but also by analogy to the statutes of positive law, the creeds or doctrines established by institutional religions. In his discussion of positive religion, Hegel speaks of the interpretation or exegesis of the biblical text.¹⁷ *Interpretation* can involve either a) *Worterklärung*, which clarifies an unfamiliar word by another more familiar word or b) *Sinnerklärung*, which clarifies the sense or import of the word (*Verstand des Wortes*).¹⁸ The former is a mere mechanical process of substitution, the latter calls on the interpreter's understanding (*Verstand*) for enlightenment (*Aufklärung*).¹⁹ As a critic of enlightenment, however, Hegel warns that this more active *Sinnerklärung* may merely cast or reflect its own light on an obscure text. Enlightenment reflections of the understanding are suspected of being arbitrary and of imposing the subject's own explanative (*erklärende*) hypotheses on a text.²⁰ What was to be the mere clarification of meaning of interpretation could end up as an anachronistic explanation.

2) *Auslegung*, by contrast, is a process of interpretation that has nothing to do with a human subject confronted by an obscure given. In the *Wissenschaft der Logik*, *Auslegung* is the way in which the absolute interprets itself by laying itself out (*auslegen*) in what actually exists.²¹ In the English translation, *The Science of Logic*, this *Auslegung* of the absolute is called its "exposition."²² Philosophically, Spinoza's system represents such an absolute exposition : everything is interpreted as either an attribute or mode of one all-encompassing or absolute substance, namely, God. Spinoza's impersonal divine substance makes room for everything that is, but neither understands it in terms of the unity of a subject nor comprehends it in terms of spirit. Spinoza's world is a mathematically extended world that reflects what is given in actuality but fails to do justice to the spontaneity of the subject and the freedom of spirit.

If the *Aufklärung* of *Sinnerklärung* expresses the inner reflections of the subject's understanding, Spinoza's system represents the more primitive stage of outer reflection. Compared to the Enlightenment appeal to the metaphorical light of our understanding, Spinoza's exposition of the absolute is considered regressive in that it recalls to Hegel the Oriental representation of emanation according to which the absolute is literally a self-illuminating light that needs external objects to produce re-

17. See *ibid.*, p. 35.

18. See *ibid.*, p. 36.

19. See *ibid.*, p. 37.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

21. See HEGEL, *Wissenschaft der Logik, Werke*, vol. 6, p. 194f.

22. See HEGEL, *Science of Logic*, trans. by W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers, London, Allen and Unwin, 1961, p. 161.

flection.²³ Whereas light tends to dissipate unless reflected back on itself, reason when properly grounded in spirit becomes self-perpetuating by internalizing what lies external to it.

Accordingly, the *Auslegung* of the absolute remains a mere exposing to light of what is. Ex-position cannot do justice to the absolute until it moves beyond reflection that is objectively directed and becomes able to posit itself (*sich-setzen*) as subject.²⁴ Then *Auslegung* moves from something laid-out (*ausgelegt*) to an active process in which it interprets itself (*legt... sich selbst aus*).²⁵

With this move, interpretation is no longer distorted by the explanative urges of understanding or intellect, but becomes part of a more comprehensive process of reason and spirit, thus encompassing the feelings and drives as well. But in Hegel this process is governed by a dialectic that explicates the necessary implications of what has been interpreted. Whereas interpretation involves making sense of actuality, the dialectic demonstrates the necessity of everything. For Hegel interpretation must always go over into a comprehension (*Begreifen*) in which it is explicated according to the concept (*Begriff*). Thus while he warns against the danger of moving from *Interpretation* to hypothetical explanation, we must in turn warn against the danger posed by Hegel's dialectic of moving from *Auslegung* to necessary explication. We see this when he moves from the interpretation of actual, positive religions to the explication of philosophical religion by a universal concept of religion in a passage that equates what has been interpreted (*ausgelegt*) with what has been rationally explicated (*expliziert*).²⁶

Shifting from *Interpretation* to *Auslegung* means moving up from the level of representational understanding to the level of presentational reason. But within the latter, *Auslegung* involves a lower stage. In neither case does Hegel exhibit a sympathetic attitude to interpretation. The laying-out or exposition of the concept is important, but it does not produce comprehension, which requires *Er-innerung* and *Ein-sicht*. What has been externalized must be reappropriated in thought to produce insight.²⁷ Interpretation cannot comprehend necessity, but is either about positive factual givens or about possibilities of reason that have been actualized. Pure possibility and pure necessity are beyond the scope of interpretation. Thus as far as Hegel is concerned, a hermeneutics, whether of *Interpretation* or *Auslegung*, or even one combining them, would fall short of a proper dialectic. This is because hermeneutics involves an external movement, either ex-egetical or ex-positional.

Only dialectics can provide a proper comprehensive order that both ex-plicates and im-plicates itself. Gadamer attempts to preserve this back and forth movement of Hegel's dialectic in his thematization of the role of language in hermeneutics. Kisiel,

23. HEGEL, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, p. 198.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

25. *Ibid.*

26. See HEGEL, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, p. 66.

27. HEGEL, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1827), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 19, 1989, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, § 465, 467, p. 342f.

in discussing these parallels between Hegel's dialectic and Gadamer's hermeneutical dialogue, writes that for Gadamer "every word is not simply a fixed and given being but rather mirrors the whole of language as its suggestive unsaid."²⁸ He compares this to Hegel's speculative sentence that "overflows into a whole system of sentences in order to express the comprehensive unity of the concept."²⁹ Clearly, Gadamer agrees with Hegel that the philosophical significance of language does not lie in the fixed assertion or judgment. Thus Gadamer writes that the very attempt to determine the sense of a word "forces us to think its opposite."³⁰ Yet, the conclusions that each draws from this are different. Hegel's dialectic is a "serious" logic that attempts to demonstrate that these shifts in meaning reflect a developmental process in which each conceptual stage preserves and refines the earlier stages. At the end of the process everything worth saying will have been said.

Gadamer's hermeneutic dialogue, by contrast, involves the more "playful" movement of a linguistic conversation which is not guided by an implicit answer, but by questions that leave the outcome open. Under the influence of Dilthey and Heidegger, Gadamer can no longer share the Hegelian optimism that at some point everything will have been said. Every saying leaves something unsaid, every disclosure must close off something else. It is this radical finitude that marks hermeneutics as it has developed in the twentieth century and to that extent it must be more attuned to Kant than to Hegel. For it is Kant who appeals to interpretation to supplement the limits of his doctrinal philosophy. Whereas in Hegel interpretation plays a preparatory, situating function, in Kant it offers a way for finite human beings to resolve some ultimate questions of judgment, such as how to relate the ideal of the highest good to our own life course.

III. KANT ON PREJUDICE, JUDGMENT, AND INTERPRETATION

Before defining Kant's relation to hermeneutics, we should address another criticism that Hegel and Gadamer level at Kant. They both fault his judgmental approach to knowledge because they think that it partitions the world. Kant's discursive judgments (*Urteile*) supposedly separate the world into basic parts (*Ur-Teile*). Hegel's response to discursive judgments is to locate true knowledge in what we can deduce or conclude (*schliessen*) about reality as a whole. Gadamer's response to the differentiation involved in aesthetic judgments, however, is not to advance speculatively to the absolute, but to go back to a prejudgmental level of experience. This again reflects the difference between a dialectical theory of truth that projects a *telos* of absolute knowledge and a dialogical theory that finds a basic access to truth through the prejudices that we inherit from our tradition.

28. KISIEL, "Hegel and Hermeneutics," p. 207.

29. *Ibid.*

30. GADAMER, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. by D.C. Smith, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, p. 23.

Gadamer's hermeneutics grants prejudice a central place because it provides the kind of pre-understanding that interpretation typically relies on. Accusing Enlightenment figures such as Kant of being blind to the value of prejudices, Gadamer discerns here the beginning of an overly methodological approach to hermeneutics that culminates in Dilthey's attempt to make hermeneutics the method of the human sciences. But in "The Blomberg Logic" of the early 1770's, Kant says that we should not reject each and every prejudice. Instead, we should "test them and investigate whether something good may yet be found in them."³¹ Then anticipating Gadamer's well-known claim that an outright discreditation of prejudice is itself a prejudice, Kant asserts: "It is possible to encounter a kind of prejudice against prejudice, namely, when one rejects virtually everything which has arisen by means of prejudices."³² Although by no means a champion of prejudices, Kant is realistic enough to know that we are shaped by them in important ways. Admitting that it is almost impossible to overcome all prejudice, he defines enlightenment as "deliverance from superstition," which is gross prejudice.³³ Some prejudices may be repositories of truth, but until we transform their blind acceptance into a seeing acceptance, we are not justified in acting on them.

The word "prejudice" can denote either an explicit, albeit premature, judgment, or it can denote an implicit understanding that informs other judgments. Gadamer exploits the hermeneutical relevance of the second meaning — prejudice as legitimate pre-understanding — without adequately addressing the dangers bound up with the first meaning. In what follows I will show that Kant's full theory of judgments allows us to deal with both aspects of prejudices.

Insofar as a prejudice involves a rush to judgment, it provides a premature determinacy. Kant undoubtedly regarded it as one of the tasks of his lectures on logic to help us see that it is often possible to counter the precipitousness of prejudices by transforming them into two related modes of judgment. By means of these transformations, Kant brings out the pre-understanding implicit in prejudices. His first step is to suspend our assent to a prejudice. Thereby he transforms what is prejudged (*praejudicium*)³⁴ in a prejudice into "a judgment to be reflected on (*judicium reflectens*)."³⁵ A prejudice that imposes a premature determinate judgment is rendered indeterminate by a *judicium reflectens*. The point of this reflective suspension is to see "whether a matter needs investigation."³⁶ To be unwilling to make this reflective-inquisitive move is to betray a prejudice against judgment.

The next step leads us to Kant's preliminary (*vorläufige*) judgment (*judicium praeivium*), which considers "how I ought to investigate a matter."³⁷ The *judicium*

31. KANT, Ak, 24, 169.

32. *Ibid.*

33. See KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, § 40, p. 137.

34. See KANT, "The Dohna-Wundlacken Logic," in *Lectures on Logic*, trans. and ed. by J. Michael Young, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 474 ; Ak, 24, 738.

35. See *ibid.*, p. 472 ; Ak, 24, 737.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 473 ; Ak, 24, 737.

37. *Ibid.*

praeivium differs from the *judicium reflectens* by not just leaving us in suspense, but also projecting a preliminary outcome that aims at a provisional determinacy. The preliminary judgment is like a working hypothesis that serves to guide inquiry into a matter about which there are conflicting opinions.

By calling preliminary judgments "maxims for investigation,"³⁸ Kant comes closest to recognizing the pre-understanding that Gadamer finds in prejudices. Whereas preliminary judgments anticipate an outcome subject to further investigation, prejudices anticipate an outcome without acknowledging the need for further inquiry. By contrast to preliminary judgments, which are subjective maxims of pre-understanding, prejudices could be said to be pseudo-objective principles of understanding. This is because Kant defines prejudices as "principles for judging based on subjective causes that are falsely held to be objective grounds"³⁹ due to a lack of reflection. Both prejudices and preliminary judgments aim at ordinary determinant judgments, but only preliminary judgments proceed reflectively.

Reflection can show, however, that some theses do not require any investigation. For example, the proposition that "between two points only one straight line is possible" is claimed by Kant to be intuitively evident. This is an example of a *a priori* truths, "which are determinant judgments (*judicia determinantia*) even before any investigation,"⁴⁰ to cite "The Dohna-Wundlacken Logic" of the 1790's. Surprisingly, Kant fails to mention what he had already shown in the *Critique of Judgment*, namely, that certain judgments cannot be determined either *a priori* or *a posteriori*. Such a judgment must remain inherently reflective and could be called a "*judicium reflectivum*" to distinguish a judgment that *has been* reflected on from the already discussed *judicium reflectens*, namely, a judgment that *is to be* reflected on. There are such inherently reflective judgments, for sometimes the subjective plausibility (*Scheinbarkeit*) of how things appear to us cannot even be transformed into objective probability (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*) through empirical investigation. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant adopted the strategy of regarding aesthetic and teleological claims about the world as reflective judgments — no amount of empirical inquiry can settle the question whether something is beautiful or purposive. With the introduction of reflective judgments we move from strictly epistemic judgments to what I would call interpretive judgments.

Having surveyed the full scope of Kant's theory of judgment, we can say that his judgments are not always the hard and fast assertions that they are claimed to be by Hegel and Gadamer. Nor are they necessarily functions of our *Verstand* or understanding qua intellect. Although willing to consider prejudices as sources of truth, Kant prefers to refine the pre-understanding involved in them into preliminary judgments. A list of proper judgments would thus include 1) the reflectively warranted pre-understanding of preliminary judgments, 2) the *a priori* and *a posteriori* determi-

38. *Ibid.*, p. 578 ; Ak, 9, 75.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 579 ; Ak, 9, 76.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 473 ; Ak, 24, 737.

nant judgments of the understanding, and 3) reflective judgments that transcend our understanding, but, as we shall see, make an interpretive use of ideas of reason.

Kant himself suggests a parallel three-tiered semantical account of reality by giving us the rudiments of a spelling-reading-interpretation metaphor. What is spelled out intuitively allows us to make preliminary judgments about a mathematically ordered world. Through concepts of the understanding we then read what is given intuitively as objects about which we can make determinate judgments.⁴¹ But Kant notes that reason wants more, namely, what he calls an "*Auslegung* or interpretation of nature."⁴² Whereas the understanding reads experience discursively, that is, diachronically, reason aims at an interpretation that integrates all our experiences into a synchronic system of nature. Kant distinguishes two kinds of interpretation of the system of nature, a "doctrinal interpretation" that is speculative and an "authentic interpretation" that is non-speculative.⁴³ I have explicated this distinction in more detail elsewhere,⁴⁴ and would summarize it as follows: a doctrinal interpretation systematizes on the basis of regulative principles of reason; an authentic interpretation does so on the basis of reflection on experience.

Kant makes this distinction between two types of interpretation, not only in his theoretical writings, but also in his writings on religion and moral philosophy. From them too it becomes clear that Kant prefers authentic over doctrinal interpretation. We first find him speaking of authentic interpretation in his 1791 essay "On the Failure of All Attempted Philosophical Theodicies." It is worth considering this discussion of authentic interpretation for certain parallels with Gadamer's already mentioned unwillingness to appeal to an original authentic performance of a drama stamped by the author's presence as the authoritative interpretation by which subsequent performances should be measured. Kant similarly tempers the view that authorial intention is definitive for authenticity when speaking of theodicy. This may not be evident at first when he asserts that "all theodicy should really be the interpretation (*Auslegung*) of nature insofar as God manifests the *intention of his will* through it."⁴⁵ Authenticity seems initially to rest exclusively on the authority of God's self-interpretation as the author of the world. But Kant goes on to claim that insofar as we conceive God rationally as a moral and wise Being, it is "*through our reason itself* that God becomes the interpreter of his will as proclaimed in his creation."⁴⁶ The meaning of the Creator's intention is mediated and co-determined by the reason possessed by his creatures. Authentic moral interpretations reconcile divine and human volitional perspectives through the intersubjective medium of practical reason, just as

41. See KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1965, A314/B370-71.

42. KANT, *Opus postumum*, Ak, 22, 173.

43. *Ibid.*

44. See Rudolf A. MAKKREEL, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the "Critique of Judgment"*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, chapters 2 and 7.

45. KANT, Ak, 8, 264.

46. *Ibid.*

reflective aesthetic judgments reconcile the feelings of self and others by reference to a *sensus communis*.⁴⁷

The comparison of authentic interpretation and reflective aesthetic judgment is relevant despite Kant's appeal to moral reason. An authentic interpretation of God's purpose for this world cannot be justified doctrinally in the traditional sense of theodicy. Doctrinal theodicies attempted to give a general theoretical justification of everything, including suffering, in this world. Because this lies beyond our capacity, doctrinal interpretations could be called pseudo-determinant judgments. Kant points to Job as having rejected the doctrinal interpretations of his afflictions given by friends who assumed that they represent God's punishment for unknown past sins and who advised him to plead for God's forgiveness.⁴⁸ Job refuses to feign contrition for sins he is not aware of and stands as the exemplar of Kant's theory of authentic interpretation. We find in the Job story an authentic theodicy because it provides a felt acceptance of suffering that at the same time preserves personal dignity. What matters here is "the uprightness of the heart" in making sense of this life, and "the shunning of feigned convictions that one does not really feel."⁴⁹ Only a genuinely felt moral interpretation of life can be authentic. Like a reflective judgment, an authentic interpretation does not claim to provide objectively valid knowledge or *Wissen* of the meaning of life. Rather, it is intersubjectively valid mode of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) "for us (for human beings as such)."⁵⁰ Thus one could say that an authentic theodicy is cognitive, but not epistemic.

Kant further develops the project of authentic interpretation and again contrasts it to that of doctrinal interpretation in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Here he is dealing not with the problem of making sense of world history, but with the more specific problem of finding meaning in a text, namely, the biblical corpus. As a philosopher, Kant aims for interpretations of the Bible that bring out its moral *spirit* and is less concerned with interpretations that test the *letter* of the Bible for its authority. The first kind of interpretation expositis Scriptures on the basis of a religion of reason, the second is based on historical scholarship. Although Kant clearly favors the moral perspective of the former, he does not reject the latter. He calls the moral kind of interpretation "authentic" and the historical kind "doctrinal."⁵¹ In a perfect world we would only need one authentic moral interpretation, but in a world that still relies on institutional authority doctrinal interpretations are needed to provide "a given people at a given time [...] a determinate (*bestimmtes*) and enduring system"⁵² of ecclesiastical faith. Doctrinal interpretations of a text provide "historical certification of its authority through the tracing back of its origin."⁵³ The historical origins sought by these doctrinal or ecclesiastical interpretations are multiple, whereas authen-

47. See KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, § 40.

48. KANT, Ak, 8, 265.

49. KANT, Ak, 8, 266f.

50. See KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, § 90, p. 314 ; Ak, 5, 462.

51. Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 105.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 105 ; Ak, 4, 114.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

tic interpretation is claimed to be "valid for the whole world."⁵⁴ Authenticity projects something more encompassing than ecclesiastical faiths, namely, a rational faith rooted in feeling, yet valid for the world community.

In the case of theodicy, doctrinal interpretation was found deficient because it was too general ; in the case of the biblical corpus, doctrinal interpretation was downgraded because it was too particularistic. Authentic interpretation seems to hold a middle communal ground.

Having examined some of Kant's discussions of interpretation, it now seems appropriate to contrast them with Hegel's. First of all Kant does not distinguish between *Interpretation* as text-oriented and *Auslegung* as the philosophically-based exposition of actuality. Kant uses *Auslegung* more than *Interpretation* and allows the former to refer to both the exegesis of texts and the interpretation of nature and history. Whereas Hegel is dismissive of interpretation as *Wörterklärung* and distrustful of interpretation as *Sinnerklärung* because it imports the explanative perspective of the representational understanding, Kant takes all modes of interpretation seriously as expressions of reason. Even doctrinal interpretations have their limited use. Doctrinal theodicies attempt to interpret history as expressing the rational will of God ; doctrinal biblical interpretation may settle for historical and institutional rationales. In neither case is the rational adequately related to human reason (*Vernunft*) as such ; in fact, doctrinal rationality tends to "reason speciously (*vernünfteln*)."⁵⁵

Like Hegel, Kant is not interested in a doctrinal theodicy that would explain the ultimate course of history modeled on the way the understanding explains natural events. This would involve a regulative use by pure theoretical reason of concepts that have their basis in the understanding. Kant turns to practical reason for his authentic theodicy, but not merely to a practical reason that legislates and postulates. An authentic interpretation of history also involves an assent of judgment to a general sense of order or providence reflecting a divine wisdom. Here practical reason is allied with reflective judgment and feeling. What is distinctive about an authentic interpretation is that it is both rational and aesthetic. The feelings appealed to are not private, arbitrary feelings, but such *a priori* moral and aesthetic feelings as respect and sublimity. These are not, *pace* Hegel, feelings in which we enjoy ourselves.

By indicating that an authentic theodicy assents to the wisdom of things, Kant invokes another distinction that concerns the nature of philosophy. Doctrinal interpretations are futile attempts to apply the scope of academic philosophy (*Philosophie nach dem Schulbegriff*) to questions that deal with how to live one's life in this world. These questions concerning practical wisdom really belong to worldly philosophy or what Kant called *Philosophie nach dem Weltbegriff*.⁵⁶ They concern not the universal themes of the first two doctrinal critiques, but reflective questions about

54. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

55. KANT, Ak, 8, 265.

56. See KANT, "The Jäsche Logic," in *Lectures on Logic*, p. 537 ; Ak, 9, 23.

how we harmonize with the human community. I have called this kind of philosophy orientational, because here we think not as observers of reality, but as participants.⁵⁷

If, as has been argued, an authentic interpretation correlates reason and feeling by means of reflective judgment, then we can also see that Kant moves beyond the mere representational theory of judgment that Hegel and Gadamer attribute to him. Kant's discussion of beauty as a symbol of the moral good in § 59 of the *Critique of Judgment*, which was praised by Gadamer for indicating that metaphor can be intuitively vivid, also shows that an idea of reason, which starts out as a mere abstract representation (*Vorstellung*), can be exhibited through a symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*). To create a symbol for an idea of reason is to find an intuitive mode of language that allows us to reflect on a rational relation by analogy to a sensuous relation. Here Kant anticipates Hegel by moving from *Vorstellung* to *Darstellung*, but he does so by insisting that such presentation is at best indirect. That is precisely why Kant's philosophy is in the end more hermeneutical than Hegel's. If we can have a direct (although mediated) knowledge of the absolute as Hegel claims, then we can ultimately dispense with interpretation. What distinguishes interpretation from dialectical explication is that it must use indirect means of understanding when direct means reach their limit. To preserve this distinction between what is directly and indirectly known, between what is said and what remains unsaid, requires a hermeneutics that lays more emphasis on judgment than we find in Hegel and Gadamer.

Aimed at conceiving the process of historical transmission, a hermeneutics of the fusion of horizons represents an important background for interpretation. However, it fails to provide us with the judgmental means to assess what is distinctive about a particular situation. Just as prejudices can sometimes be transformed into more reflective judgments, so the continuity of tradition must at times make way for a critical discontinuity. Aesthetic reflective judgment can play its part in this because it at the same time participates in the continuity of feeling and in the capacity of judgment to discern differences. Differences need not always be defined in terms of opposites as Hegel assumes. It is also possible to make more subtle distinctions as part of a continuum. Thus aesthetic judgment can serve to focus our attention by highlighting some aspects of what is given and allowing other aspects to recede without disappearing.

Dilthey's so-called methodological approach to hermeneutics and the human sciences has been criticized by Gadamer for leading to a sterile opposition between explanation and understanding, as two modes of induction. In fact, Dilthey's greatest contribution to understanding in the human sciences is to illustrate how we can give determinacy to indeterminate aesthetic sensibility. His capacity to articulate what might otherwise remain a vague continuum, to locate a typical focal point for a historical context, shows what we have claimed to be implicit in Kant's reflective judgment. Aesthetic judgments may be indeterminate insofar as they express feelings, but they also orient us to something more encompassing. In the case of symbolization this orientation can make use of the formal determinacy of rational ideas.

57. See MAKKREEL, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*, chapter 8.

In delineating Kant's larger theory of judgments we spoke of transforming the premature determinacy of prejudices into the indeterminacy of preliminary judgments. Conversely, by considering aesthetic ideas as the symbolic counterparts of rational ideas, reflective judgment through its very indeterminacy may be able to open up the abstract determinacy of our rational idea of the highest good. This capacity to balance determinacy and indeterminacy and to play them off against each other seems to be the real contribution of aesthetic *Erlebnis*. Gadamer's *Erfahrung* of the authority of tradition tends to fuse determinacy and indeterminacy in a way that makes critical judgment difficult. Although from his encompassing mediation perspective it is possible to discern some flexibility in human prejudices over time, from the perspective of someone situated at a specific point in the process the authority of tradition is quite determinant. The possibility of cultivating understanding through interpretive judgments is crucial for individuals to gain some leverage on their situation.

*
* *

I have argued against Gadamer that Hegel's philosophy is less hermeneutical than it seems. Because Hegel proceeds historically and insists that everything be constantly redefined, his dialectic manifests certain parallels to hermeneutics. Nevertheless, we saw that in the end he is more concerned with the logical explication of a total system than with the understanding of historical process. Moreover, his own comments on interpretation do not manifest an appreciation of its importance. I would characterize Hegel's philosophy as para-hermeneutical in large part because his dialectic of externally laying out or exposing ideas and reappropriating them in thought does not make use of the way in which feelings can internalize our situation and orient us in evaluating it. Kant's philosophy I would consider proto-hermeneutical in that it takes seriously the problem of compensating for the limits of the understanding through feeling, reflective judgment, and interpretation. This then is how I would revise Gadamer's account of how Kant and Hegel relate to the history of modern hermeneutics. This revision is important because French thinkers such as Derrida and Lyotard tend to dismiss hermeneutics as just another mode of system-building or totalization. They have exploited the attraction for Hegel evidenced by Gadamer and Ricœur to mischaracterize hermeneutics in general.